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ABSTRACT

This analysis of intensive interviews conducted with Indian and Applachian artists examines the lives of women and men of increasing economic means. The study explores the changing roles and power structure in decision-making, as affected by increasing economic independence. The style of this research is feminist in nature. Interviews are unstructured, allowing the interviewee to shape the course of the exchange. This method, more than traditional patriarchical approaches, guards against preconceived biases on the part of the interviewer. A list of references is included, as are three appendices--(1) Interview questions; (2) Results summary, and (3) Tribes sampled. (Author/DB)

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Emerging Female Leaders Within the Closed Societies of American Indian and Appalachian Artisans.

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Abstract

This analysis of intensive interviews conducted with Indian and Appalachian artists examines the lives of women and men of increasing economic means. It explores changing roles and power structure in decision-making, as affected by increasing economic independence. The style of this research is feminist in nature. Interviews are unstructured, allowing the interviewee to shape the course of the exchange. This method, more than traditional patriarchal approaches, guards against preconceived biases on the part of the interviewer.

Appalachian and Southwestern Indian Artisans:
Differential Perception of Work and Power within Closed Societies.

The sale of artwork is becoming increasingly popular and lucrative for artisans in the United States. With this new found income may come shifts in power structure. Two prominent artist groups from closed societies are the South Western Indian and Eastern Appalachian. The characteristics of these economies may cause the incumbents to act in certain ways, but have no bearing on societal differences between the two groups (Bokemeier & Tickamyer, 1985).

The approach and orientation these two groups of artists may take can be entirely different. The Native American group tends to use an "intrapsychic mode", while the Appalachian group tends to use a "information-seeking mode"(Chovan & Chovan, 1985).
The Appalachian perception of age-old of male supremacy (Mitchell & Schnyder, 1989 p.978) is not historically shared by the often matrilineal and matrilocal Indian societies (Foote & Schackel, 1983, p.22). As the women within these groups become more prominent as financial contributors it may be that some group dynamics shift with respect to these female artisans, differing somewhat between the two societies.

Method

The present study is a qualitative analysis of the experiences of female and male artisans of two traditionally closed societies. Interviewers conducted interviews with 18 Southwestern American Indian and 5 Appalachian artists. The list of tribes to which

participants belonged is in Appendix C.

Examination of financial influence was geared toward questioning whether these female and male artists contributed to the tribe or family, and whether these contributions changed the power or decision-making structure.

Questions were open-ended, allowing the individuals to shape the interview. This method, more than traditional patriarchal approaches, guards against preconceived biases on the part of the interviewer. Early questions were more general, and as the interview continued, became progressively more specific. Interviews explored how the artists became involved, whether they contributed to family or tribal finances, and who made the decisions. Two primary questions were "How did you get into this" and "What happens to the money". More specific questions included "Where do you get your ideas?", and "How did you learn the art?". The list of questions are in Appendix A.

Results

Money or contributions did not appear to have an effect on Tribal decision-making processes. The primary source of support in times of hardship for both groups was the family. Formal decisions are still made by the elder males. Tribal power is held by the elders, by virtue of clan membership. Appalachian power is held by the father; the male elder of the family, by virtue of family position. Acceptance of power and position was stronger with men than with women.

Both groups learned their crafts from family, friends or in a

class. They did, however, differ in inspiration sources. Indian artisans learned the craft from parents or in a class and turned to their heritage for ideas and inspiration. Appalachian artisans generally learned from a friend or in a class, and got ideas from books, the work of other artists or from experimentation.

Both Indian and Appalachian respondents kept the money earned from their art and were amazed that there might be alternatives to this. Money or contributions did not appear to have an effect on Tribal decision-making processes.

Gender differences emerged in understanding of this power. Men had more "cut and dried" approaches to this. Women were more likely to express feelings of responsibility to others, continuing to work in the reservation, or donating resources to used by the less fortunate members. Men were more likely to say that they had pulled away from the closed-society on purpose, and any expression of attachment was expressed in terms of what they had themselves lost by doing so. A results summary can be found in Appendix B.

Conclusion

Traditional Euro-american gender roles may be becoming stronger for men in both cultures as they search for a sense of identity. The next phase of this research will extend to include behavioral observation of the impact of work on informal decision making. It may be that female artisans have more and different power than they perceive. They appear however, to be presently ascribing to traditional terms of power. Elder males hold power as a result of tribal membership or family position. Power as a

result of financial contribution may be newer to the Appalachian artisans, who are also engaging in skills not perceived as traditional for them.

Female artisans may be unaware of power they do hold. It may be that female artisans have more power than they are aware of. They are, however, presently giving lip service to traditional norms of power in the hands of elder males who are in power as a result of Tribal membership or family position. These women express acceptance of traditional norms of power in the hands of elder males, in power as a result of Tribal or family position. For the Indian women this increased financial contribution may represent a return to traditional times when women exerted a great deal of power (Tsosie, 1988).

References

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Owen, F. W., (1987) Rhetorical Themes of Emergent Female Leaders. Small Group Behavior, 17(4), p. 475-486.

Tsosie, R. (1988). Changing Women: The Cross-Currents of American Feminine Identity. American Indian Culture and Research Journal, 12(1), p. 1-37.

Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. How did the artists learn their craft?
2. Where did they get their ideas and inspiration?
3. Who kept the profits from the sale of the artwork?
4. Did income affect decision-making?
5. How did individuals understand/accept the decision-making structure in each society?
6. Did individuals contribute to the Tribe or family finances?
7. Did they pull away from the family or Tribe?
   If so, what were the repercussions?

Appendix B

Results Summary

1. Indians learned their art from parents or in a class. Appalachians learned from a friend or in a class.
2. Indian artists drew upon their heritage for their inspiration. Appalachian artists got their ideas from books, the work of other artists, or from experimentation.
3. Both Appalachian and Indian artists, female or male, kept the money earned from their art and expressed amazement that there might be alternatives to this. Financial status was not related to decision-making power.
4. Money or contributions did not appear to have an effect on decision-making processes for either Appalachian or Indian artists, female or male.
5. Gender differences emerged in understanding of this power. Acceptance of power and position was stronger with men.
6. Women were more likely to express feelings of responsibility to others. They continued to work in the reservation, and donated resources to be used by the less fortunate members.
7. Men were more likely to say that they had pulled away on purpose. Feelings of attachment were expressed in terms of what they had themselves lost by doing so.
8. Formal decisions are made by the males of both societies.
9. The family was the primary source of support for both groups during times of hardship.

Appendix C

Tribes Sampled

Acoma

Zuni

Hopi

Santa Domingo

Navajo

Osage

Jemez

Author Notes

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